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## Israel Aiding Mengistu in Ethiopia

It is no secret that Ethiopia's famine has been made worse by the actions of its Marxist leader, Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam. Instead of mounting an all-out effort to help feed the starving millions, he has devoted the government's energies to putting down rebel tribesmen in the northern areas where famine has been most severe.

What is a well-kept secret, though, is that Mengistu has been getting military aid from Israel almost since the day he seized power 10 years ago. What makes this surprising is that, according to a secret CIA report seen by my reporters Dale Van Atta and Scott Barrett, Israel was second only to the United States as a source of military and technical aid to Ethiopia during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie, the man Mengistu ousted in 1974. The United States didn't make the ideological leap, but Israel did.

While Mengistu got his military training in the United States, several of his associates were trained at an Ethiopian military academy staffed by Israelis. Ever since he and his colleagues seized power, they have been "in discreet contact with Israel," the CIA report states, adding: "The Israelis, for their part, welcome any opportunity to improve their position in Africa."

Though Israeli military advisers were kicked out of Ethiopia in 1973 when diplomatic relations were broken, they were secretly invited back by Mengistu in December 1975. The CIA report explains that Mengistu and his cohorts "decided that the Israelis could help the army cope with the many insurrections throughout the country," and that this service outweighed any political fallout

from Ethiopia's Arab neighbors. In addition to training, the Israelis offer Mengistu's army weapons it needs to fight the rebels in the northern provinces. They have sold him at least \$20 million in Soviet-made munitions and spare parts captured two years ago from the Palestinians in Lebanon.

The Soviets, of course, remain Mengistu's major military patron. This alliance began in 1977 when the Kremlin decided to ditch Somalia, Ethiopia's neighbor to the east, which had been harboring anti-Mengistu rebels.

"Up to 17,000 Cuban troops and over \$1 billion in Soviet arms were rushed to Ethiopia by early 1978," a secret Joint Chiefs of Staff report states, "and the Soviets deployed a general staff to organize and direct the Cuban-Ethiopian war effort against Somalia."

The Soviet intervention in Ethiopia, according to the joint chiefs' report, was even bigger than that in Angola, which began in 1975. More than 1,500 Soviet military advisers are stationed in Ethiopia, though the Cuban troops have been cut back to about 5,000, mostly on the Somali border. East German advisers have dwindled from the 550 counted by western intelligence in Addis Ababa two years ago.

What do the Soviets get for their help? Perhaps their biggest strategic prize is the Dahlak Islands in the Red Sea, near the Ethiopian port of Massawa. The Soviets have been building a naval and air base there for three years, including the world's largest floating dock. Intelligence reports indicate that the islands are now a virtual Soviet enclave, off limits even to Ethiopians.